

## Waiting for the state: gender, citizenship and everyday encounters with bureaucracy in India

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# **Waiting for the State: gender, citizenship and everyday encounters with bureaucracy in India<sup>1</sup>**

**Grace Carswell, Thomas Chambers and Geert De Neve**

## **Abstract**

*This article focuses on practices and meanings of time and waiting experienced by poor, low-class Dalits and Muslims in their routine encounters with the state in India. Drawing on ethnographic research from Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, it presents experiences of waiting around queuing and applying for paperwork, cards, and welfare schemes, in order to examine the role of temporal processes in the production of citizenship and citizen agency. An analysis of various forms of waiting – ‘on the day’, ‘to and fro’, and ‘chronic’ waiting – reveals how temporal processes operate as mechanisms of power and control through which state actors and other mediators produce differentiated forms of citizenship and citizens. Temporal processes and their material outcomes, we argue, are shaped by class, caste and religion, while also drawing on - and reproducing - gendered identities and inequalities. However, rather than being ‘passive’ patients of the state, we show how ordinary people draw on money, patronage networks and various performative acts in an attempt to secure their rights as citizens of India.*

## **Key words**

Time; waiting; gender; citizenship; patronage; India

## **Introduction: Waiting for the state**

Time matters. But time - the forms and meanings it takes when waiting - are not experienced identically by everyone, everywhere (Appadurai, 2004; Frederiksen, 2008). This article focuses on meanings and practices of waiting encountered by poor, low-class Dalit and Muslim Indians in interactions with the state. We explore practices of waiting - around applying for paperwork, documents, cards, and welfare schemes - as constituting the materiality and temporality of citizen-state interactions. Waiting, queuing, applying and seeking signatures and approvals are, we argue, processes that generate citizenship and citizen rights, and establish fragmented forms of state power and citizen agency. Whilst these processes constitute the

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materiality of citizen-state encounters, this article explores the importance of attending to spatio-temporal dimensions embodied in waiting, as well as intersections with gender, class, caste and religion.

Waiting takes various forms. Sociological scholarship has described long-term waiting as 'prolonged' or 'chronic' time, spanning months, years, lifetimes or even generations. 'Chronic' waiting has been explored within un/employment (Axelsson et al, 2015; Ferguson, 2006; Jeffrey, 2010; Jeffrey and Young, 2012; Ozoliņa-Fitzgerald, 2016), migration (Conlon, 2011; Harney, 2014), asylum seeking (Griffiths, 2014; Rotter, 2015; Turnbull, 2015), prison release (Foster, 2016) and marriage (Ramdas, 2012). Here, waiting is often sustained by imagined futures or aspirations which enable tolerance of short to medium term precariousness (Cross, 2014; Jeffrey and Young, 2012) with the wait itself often experienced as 'lost' or 'dead' time (Jeffrey, 2008: 956).

We discuss two other variations of waiting. Short-term, or 'on the day' waiting, and 'to and fro' waiting. The former involves time in queues or outside offices waiting to submit paperwork to officials or bureaucrats. This often involves uncertainty and fear of refusal, being told paperwork is incorrect, or having to return another day. 'On the day' waiting is less explored (for exceptions see Auyero, 2012 and Corbridge, 2004), yet shapes many people's encounters with the state in India as elsewhere. We show how 'on the day' waiting often encapsulates poor people's interactions with local state representatives and is widely considered 'wasted' or 'lost' time'.

Linked to this is 'to and fro' time, or what Secor refers to as 'go today, come tomorrow' (2007: 40), comprising multiple visits to offices with paperwork, evidence and signatures. Like 'on-the-day' waiting, it is also seen as 'time that costs' in terms of lost work or earnings and embodies similar frustrations of uncertainty. Secor's study of state-citizen encounters in Istanbul documents 'narratives of circulation' that trace movements of people, 'documents, money, and influence through government offices, waiting rooms ministries, hospitals, police stations and courts' (2007: 38). Repeated cycles of referral and deferral shape seemingly endless circulations that constitute people's experiences of citizenship and state encounter. Circulation not only captures spatial (to towns, offices, etc) and temporal (back and forth) movements produced by the state but also the state's power '*to hold in suspension* actors, actions, justice, and rights' (2007: 38).

We show how both 'on the day' and 'to and fro' waiting shape poor people's circulatory, often prolonged, encounters with the state in their attempts to obtain paperwork and access welfare schemes. We illustrate how state power and citizen agency interacts, but also explore how waiting, queuing and time are temporal features through which citizenship and citizens are created in fragmented, ambivalent and contested ways (Auyero, 2011; Oldfield and Greyling, 2015; Secor, 2007). In particular, women are differently implicated in encounters with the state and production of citizenship, taking a disproportionate share of waiting 'work' and being subjected to additional processes of subjugation and exclusion.

Finally, the article reveals state-society encounters as experienced through different temporal rhythms which combine, intersect and flow into each other (Axelsson et al., 2015). Elderly poor people waiting for state pensions, for example, may queue at an office for a day, only to be told to return with additional forms or signatures. What started as 'on-the-day' waiting becomes 'to and fro' or circulatory movements and may even turn into prolonged waits of months or years, often involving temporal uncertainty around whether the pension will materialise and resulting in a 'chronic' state of despair, fear or expectation.

### *Power, agency, and the production of citizens*

A key debate around 'chronic' waiting concerns the ways power, control and discipline are produced through waiting, along with spaces for agency that open up in the process. Chronic waiting may not be passive, comprising wasted time alone, but can be 'an active and intentional practice' through which people pursue futures (Axelsson et al., 2015: 2). Axelsson et al describe Chinese migrant chefs in Sweden who comply with exploitative work conditions short term as a future-oriented strategy to obtain long-term settlement/citizen rights. Jeffrey notes that 'waiting must be understood not as the capacity to ride out the passage of time or as the absence of action, but rather as an active, conscious, materialized practice in which people forge new political strategies' (2008: 957). In work on chronic waiting among educated, unemployed youth in North India, Jeffrey and Young observed young men not only forming friendships and solidarity, but collaborating across class, caste and religion to protest against state and university bureaucracies. This provided 'a seed-bed for new cultural and political forms' (2012: 638) with the potential to challenge longstanding class inequalities, if only fleetingly (ibid: 658). 'Timepass', a vernacular expression of chronic waiting, was not only about passing surplus time, but provided space for forging 'new forms of urban conviviality and ... novel forms of politics' (ibid: 649). The 'agentic capacity' inherent in waiting, which can turn feelings of time 'lost' into more productive experiences, has now been widely noted (Bissell, 2007; Foster, 2016; Gasparini, 1995; Griffiths, 2014).

Whilst we document various acts of agency, we also build on observations by Auyero (2011) and others that waiting is implicated in producing violence, power and powerlessness. Power is never 'just there' but is produced through control over people's time and movements. Indeed, 'the temporality of bureaucratic systems also functions as a mediator of power and a mechanism of subordination' (Ghertner, 2017: 2). This is particularly transparent in circulatory waiting practices that poor people experience when engaging with local state institutions. Writing on poor people's waiting in Buenos Aires's welfare offices, Auyero argues that the state's ability to impose waiting, reschedule appointments and force repeated returns reflected far-reaching control over people's time and hence the working of state domination. Auyero concludes that this creates 'compliant clients' or 'patients of the state' rather than claim-making citizens (2011: 5). Endless processes of uncertainly waiting for benefits made applicants despairing and despondent. For Auyero, the

welfare office was not a space of bargaining or negotiation, but 'of compliance, a universe in which you "sit down and wait" instead of attempting to complain or negotiate with welfare authorities' (ibid: 21). Subjugation was created through waiting and compliance, with such practices constituting a 'governing technique' through which state power was articulated and a 'docile body of welfare clients' created (ibid: 25).

Griffiths' study of refused asylum seekers and immigration detainees in Britain, similarly shows how applying, queueing and waiting is bound up in power, control and bureaucratic domination. Here, 'the imposition of waiting, always with a glimmer of hope for eventual change, is part of the technique of control that sustains the marginality and compliance of undocumented migrants' (2014: 1996). The processes of applying for cards and paperwork discussed in this article are similarly productive of relations of domination and subordination. Women, members of lower castes and Muslims are made to apply, wait, return and beg for approval in spaces often dominated by male, high-caste and Hindu officials or through local bureaucrats, village presidents and political actors who may or may not share identities aligned with applicants.

Following Olson, we critique representations of power as pre-existing or static, and instead examine how 'space and waiting come together to *produce* and *maintain* potentially abusive and harmful arrangements of power and inequality' (2015: 517, italics added). Waiting produces differentiated citizens and 'hierarchies which segregate people and places into those which matter and those which do not' (Ramdas, 2012: 834). Individuals claiming from the state know they must wait appropriately, or face the consequences (Olson, 2015), including denial of citizenship. Waiting - and being made to wait - is an 'everyday' governing technique through which subjects and citizens are created, and subordination and compliance produced (Olson, 2015: 522; Foucault 1979). Gupta has highlighted how everyday bureaucratic practices produce structural violence in India through which certain groups are excluded from material entitlements or citizenship rights (2012: 33). He argues that structural violence is enacted through arbitrary outcomes of bureaucratic actions and through the indifference attached to such arbitrariness (ibid.: 6). Arbitrary outcomes, he suggests, are themselves the product of highly disaggregated and multi-layered state institutions that offer opportunities for keeping people waiting and producing uncertainty. We build on this argument, but in a critical way. While a highly differentiated Indian state does indeed facilitate bureaucratic ambiguity and exclusion, we show that such outcomes are anything but arbitrary. Instead, they are the systemic product of gender, caste and religion-based forms of discrimination through which marginalisation and exclusion is reproduced.

Following Secor, our argument shows that narratives of circulation - 'go today, come tomorrow' - 'provide critical insights into everyday socio-spatial constitutions of power – not despite but because of their very banality' (2007: 42). However, our ethnography also sheds light on, the currently little documented, socio-spatial

agency of ordinary people. We explore spaces, times and performances of agency that enable poor and marginalised people to become more than just passive agents of the state, albeit in differentiated and constrained ways.

### *Patronage, money and morality*

Documenting how Indian Muslims and Dalits negotiate temporal impositions of waiting in everyday - banal - encounters with the state offers insights into the workings of the state and modalities of citizenship. It also illuminates forms of patronage in everyday state-society encounters and shows how this is mediated by gender and other identity markers. While Secor pointed out that in Istanbul 'only money, influence and personal networks afforded individuals with the ability to break out of endless cycles of circulating and waiting' (2007: 39), in India too state-society interaction is mediated by a host of political society actors, including brokers, middlemen and political parties (Ghandi, 2016; Piliavsky, 2014; Corbridge et al, 2012). For Chatterjee (1998) political society is key to the poor's access to public resources and political mediators who are indispensable in bringing people to the state and the state to people. Others have pointed to the 'dark side' of such mediation, seeing it as 'integral to processes that dispossess people of their rights and to the reproduction of elite power' (Martin, 2014: 419; Witsoe, 2012). The gender, caste and religious divisions that curb political society's ability to represent interests of ordinary people are often pervasive (Pattenden, 2016; Picherit, 2015; Still, 2011). And yet the literature remains ambivalent on the role of political mediators. In India, various patrons act as middlemen and brokers, enabling access to state resources. Rather than being vilified as 'corrupt' by ordinary people, these actors are valued (Ghandi, 2016), accusations of corruption only surface when they fail to deliver on promises, thus 'wasting' people's time and money. As Osella put it, 'accusations of corruption ... do not concern the exchange of money for favours, but the failure to fulfil promises made to clients' (2014: 367), and Piliavsky notes that within vernacular understandings of mediation it is not the 'misuse of public office for private gain, but the collapse of "good patronage"—when patron-politicians prove instrumental, selfish and tight' (2014: 32) that is bemoaned. We show the poor as being 'time-starved' and therefore willing to 'buy time' by mobilising middlemen, activating patronage and paying money to obtain valued 'resources'.<sup>2</sup>

We fill a gap in the literature by examining how mediation and patronage shape people's access to the state, and exploring the time-related processes that this involves for marginalised groups. While personal networks, status and money can shorten waiting periods, it is clear that access to mediation is not equally distributed resulting in some being less well placed to claim entitlements and rights. As Corbridge comments, scarcity produces forms of patronage and queue-jumping that

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<sup>2</sup> Importantly, what is routinely labelled as 'corruption' in the 'global south' often does not differ much from more formalised practices of queue-jumping and paying for faster access to services in other parts of the world. Purchasing a 'Q-bot' at Legoland or paying to use 'fast-tracks' at airports, for example, enables the shortcutting of queues (see for example Frølund (2016).)

affect the poor disproportionately. Queue-jumping 'is overwhelmingly an affront to the poor (and poorer women especially), and it is roundly condemned by the poor themselves' (2004: 195). Our ethnography focuses on the temporal aspects of accessing the state and we too argue that it is often those without influence, connections or money who are left to wait and queue, hence being subjected to the 'dark side' of patronage (Martin 2014).

Moreover, recent research shows waiting patterns to be highly gendered (Auyero, 2011; Conlon, 2011), with women often shouldering 'waiting work.' In India too, the time and effort spent waiting at government offices often falls on women, but this has remained largely undocumented in the literature. Our contribution demonstrates how waiting processes not only reflect but also produce gendered hierarchies and feminine 'attributes'. Being made to wait by men - often of higher status or dominant religion - produces 'women' as passive, submissive and dependent. As women are made to wait, beg, be submissive, patient and grateful, gendered power hierarchies are constructed via the very bureaucratic processes. Through waiting and queuing, associations between women, submissiveness and patience are produced and reinforced. Such associations becomes further entrenched as they intersect with caste, class and space.

Whether they are Dalit women facing higher caste men in Tamil Nadu, or poorer Muslim women facing Hindu men in Uttar Pradesh, bureaucratic processes are deeply embedded in the social reproduction of gendered inequality at the state-society interface. Gender hierarchies are not just produced at home or in the market, but also in encounters with the state. The processes through which this gendering takes place vary. In rural Tamil Nadu low-caste Dalit women take on the bulk of bureaucratic responsibility. In Uttar Pradesh, women also shoulder much of this work but do so in spaces often seen as a male 'public' realm. In both cases, however, engagements with the state are not just gendered but constitute a space in which gendered subjectivities are produced and entrenched.

## **Contextualising the study**

### *Ethnographic research in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh*

Field research was undertaken in two villages in Tamil Nadu and a Muslim neighbourhood of Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh. The Tamil Nadu villages, Allapuram and Mannapalayam,<sup>3</sup> are in the hinterland of Tiruppur a major garment-producing centre. Both villages are made up of a dominant landowning community, the Gounders, various intermediate caste groups, and many Dalits, both Arunthathiyars and Adi Dravidas. Allapuram villagers work in Tiruppur's garment industry or

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<sup>3</sup> All names, including the villages, are pseudonyms.

agriculture, whilst in Mannapalayam agriculture and powerloom work coexist. In both villages, Dalits are largely landless, finding livelihoods as casual labour in agriculture and textiles. While some Dalits earn a regular income, most experience highly precarious livelihoods, with many subjected to forms of unfree labour in powerloom workshops (Carswell and De Neve, 2013; 2014a). Many continue to live on the edge of poverty, with the poorest villagers being predominantly Dalit.

Carswell and De Neve have carried out ethnographic research in these villages since 2008 and built extensive relations of trust across communities. Fieldwork for this study, conducted in 2014 and 2015, drew on mixed methods, including observations at ration shops and NGREGA sites, involved more than 70 semi-structured interviews with villagers from across castes and with local village officials. In both Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh informants were very willing to recount and discuss their waiting and application processes but observing all their temporal and spatial movements was difficult as was interviewing higher-level bureaucrats. This paper therefore presents a bottom-up view, illustrating how members of marginalised rural and urban communities engage with the local state in attempts to activate citizenship rights.

In Uttar Pradesh, the city of Saharanpur has many Muslim dominated neighbourhoods known for wood manufacturing in which Chambers has worked since 2011, with this fieldwork conducted in 2015 and 2016. The neighbourhoods are relatively poor with many residents employed as woodcarvers, carpenters, polishers or general labourers. Spatial segregation of Muslims in Saharanpur, a feature across North India (Jaffrelot and Gayer, 2012), means that larger properties of wealthier individuals intermingle with poorer dwellings. The neighbourhood are of mixed *biraderi* (muslim caste/community) and comprise densely populated residential alleyways and workshops. Fieldwork focused on Muslim residents with interviews and informal discussions conducted in workshops, homes, ration shops and government offices. As with Carswell and De Neve's work in Tiruppur, Chambers' long term research experience in the area on migration, urban space and labour in the wood industry (Chambers, forthcoming; Chambers & Ansari, 2018) enabled him to build extensive trust-based networks. Thus, much of the data presented here was gathered through informal conversations and visits to state offices, ration shops and other locations with existing informants. In addition, over 50 semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals who were beyond Chambers' immediate network of friends but who were introduced to him by those with whom strong bonds had already been developed. Although higher level officials were difficult to access, 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with lower-level *netas* (politicians) and *pradhans* (village heads), approached through existing contacts.

Working with Dalits in Tamil Nadu and Muslims in Uttar Pradesh enables us to produce a comparative analysis of how waiting is experienced as part of state-society relations across two disadvantaged communities in contemporary India. Comparison was central to the research design and proved highly revealing. While



in both localities marginalised communities struggled to access the state, their gendered experiences of time, the ways in which power relations were reproduced through processes of waiting, and the gendered expressions of both submissiveness and agency were remarkably similar.

### *Cards, paperwork and time*

The bureaucratic encounters in this article involve applications for ration cards and identity cards, registration for job cards and voter cards, and various certificates that confirm education, residence, caste identity, as well as entitlement to state resources and welfare. Applications often require numerous signatures, recommendations and circulatory visits to government offices, placing demands on time and encouraging seeking of shortcuts through money or patronage.

Different cards and paperwork have distinct temporal processes. In rural Tamil Nadu every household has a ration card listing all household members, providing access to the Public Distribution System (PDS) through ration shops and periodic state government distributions. The Aadhaar card, launched in 2010, is an individual biometric identity card. Initially voluntary, the Aadhaar card has effectively become compulsory with the 2016 Aadhaar Bill giving the government 'sweeping power to make Aadhaar mandatory for a wide range of facilities and services' (Drèze, 2016). From 2015 Aadhaar cards were linked with gas subsidies and MGNREGA wages<sup>4</sup>. The MGNREGA job card is a booklet given to anyone registered for work under the scheme. This social protection scheme, rolled out nationwide in 2006, gives all rural households the right to 100 days of employment on public works. The voting card is universal for over 18s and enables vote casting at both national and state elections (Carswell and De Neve, 2014b). In addition, there are various other cards and certificates, such as residence and community certificates, which enable access to state schemes and provide recognition by the state.

Similar cards are held by households in Saharanpur with some distinctions. MGNREGA job cards are not present in the city as they are part of a rural scheme. Almost all households have a ration card and most individuals have voting cards. As in Tamil Nadu, the Aadhaar card was increasingly common. Initially treated as unnecessary, the tying of gas subsidies to Aadhaar meant people rushed to apply, triggering a burgeoning industry dedicated to facilitating applications. However, the number of cards held by households and individuals proved lower than in Tamil Nadu and Muslims residents often complained about limited access to state support. Additionally, the meaning and value associated with certain cards echoed a sense of marginalisation. The voting card, for example, enabled voting but also provided a means through which citizenship could be proven - specifically that an individual was not from Pakistan or Bangladesh. Carrying a Muslim name meant ID cards took on a passport-like quality when passing beyond the 'imagined border' of the

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<sup>4</sup> Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005.

neighbourhood (Chambers, forthcoming), leading to waiting and interactions with the state being experienced in particularised ways.

### **Everyday experiences of chronic, ‘to and fro’ and ‘on the day’ waiting**

Our field data show how time and waiting are inherently political. Social contacts and networks - ‘known people’ – along with money are critical for saving time, bypassing waiting processes or hastening outcomes. Whether this is ‘bribery’, ‘oiling the wheels’ or paying to save time, money is central to encounters with middle(wo)men and state representatives. Moreover, considerations of money and time are suffused with concerns of dignity: how one is treated by officials and mediators is particularly important for marginalised and stigmatised communities whose members understand that encounters with the state are sites where domination and subordination are expressed and reproduced.

A widely discussed example of ‘chronic waiting’ in rural Tamil Nadu, concerns waiting for an Old Age Pension (OAP). Despite evidence of increasing numbers of pensioners in Tamil Nadu, villagers saw the OAP amongst the hardest schemes to access. A doctor’s certificate is needed for age confirmation, then a completed application form and ‘recommendation’ from the president and VAO (Village Administrative Officer). This then goes to the Revenue Inspector and on to the Tahsildar in the Taluk (sub-district) office. There – if all goes well – one should be registered for an OAP and receive a registration certificate, enabling the pension.

It rarely works like this. Sumati an elderly woman from Allapuram explained ‘you need four signatures: VAO, revenue inspector, village president and a doctor [but, even if eligible] somebody has to tell’, meaning you need a recommendation. The process, she said, ‘may take one or two years’. Another elderly woman, Danalakshmi, interrupted, telling us that despite being eligible she never received an OAP:

I have applied a hundred times. I have asked people, but they said mine was not sanctioned yet. They keep giving the same answer. ... how many times can you ask? I have been asking for four years, this is the fifth year.

Laughing but fed up, she joked: ‘They put it under their bum and sit on it – that’s how they treat us! You have to bribe them!’ Sumati agreed: ‘if you go with money it takes a week. Without money it will take a year.’

Noor, a 40-year-old widow in Saharanpur, experienced similar chronic waiting for a widow’s pension. These payments are small, but Noor had only a meagre income from home-based piece-rate woodwork. Her husband’s death a decade earlier led to a protracted and fruitless engagement with local officers for a widow’s pension.

For 11 years I went to many offices and filled many forms for a widow’s pension. ... I have no ration card and I have also been to many offices to try

and get one. ... Lots of money is needed as a bribe but still no result! One officer lied. He said my pension was ready at the post office, but when I went there the post officer shouted 'every day lots of widows come here like you, we cannot do anything, it is the government problem. Do not come here'. The first officer had given a false slip for the pension and taken a bribe from me, only later when I got to the post office did I find out that it was useless.

Even those with kin who know the system and officials struggle. We spoke to Meena in Mannapalayam, a bank employee who visits villages with a 'smart card' machine to distribute pensions and other payments. Her grandmother applied for an OAP over a year earlier but had not received anything. Meena enquired at the taluk office but was told that her grandmother would only receive a pension when another village resident with an OAP died. The reason was never explained. Despondently, she told us, 'whenever someone dies, I try to get my grandmother's pension, but still nothing'. Even for Meena, who was knowledgeable about cards, procedures and applications, much remains opaque. Higher up the system people encounter even less transparency, with eligibility, registration and sporadic payments remaining unexplained, leaving people with a sense of arbitrariness (Gupta 2012).

In both field sites 'narratives of circulation' (Secor, 2007), involving 'on the day' and 'to and fro' waiting, were common. This can best be illustrated through the ration card, probably the most important document for poor households. When couples set up independent homes, they must apply for their own ration card and provide evidence that their names have been removed from parents' cards. While apparently straightforward, in practice it often takes many visits to offices in different places over several months. Visanti, a newly married Dalit woman in Allapuram explained:

First we went to the taluk office in Tiruppur to remove my name [from parents' card]. The lady said she would do this but she messed things up. After five or six months she said she never had the card. Eventually my father went, took that lady's phone and ...threatened her saying, 'you find that card or else contact whoever you need to contact, but you find that card'. After three hours she had found the card, and the card came back home. Then I went again to remove my name... We had to go to Dharapuram taluk office to get my name on our new card but for that it was my father-in-law who went. In total, there were about 8 trips to those offices.

Visanti's story demonstrates the time-consuming nature of application processes, showing how paperwork can get 'stuck', even in straightforward cases. Her 'to and fro' narrative also reveals the importance of patronage and gender. Visanti's father is the brother of a local District Councillor and himself a government employee for the Electricity Board. Despite being a Dalit, his extensive patronage networks, his gender and his political connections gave him confidence to threaten the (female) office worker. While Visanti could have mentioned the same connections, it needed a man to be taken seriously. Whilst visiting such offices is a time burden often

imposed on women, the process remains dependent on male interventions at crucial points. Widowed, divorced or separated women are particularly vulnerable as a lack of male support further undermines their ability to access welfare and citizenship rights.

'To and fro' waiting also entails expensive spatial movements that are subject to gendered constraints. As Heller points out, 'given that local government is often absent or just extraordinarily weak in much of the developing world, there are in fact very few points of contact with the state for ordinary citizens' (2009: 126). People must therefore routinely travel to wherever relevant offices are located. While in rural Tamil Nadu women and men said that access to local village officials and mediators was relatively straightforward, albeit not always productive, their struggles also involved more taxing trips, often taking most of a day, to towns further away to see higher-level officials. Although informants were concerned about lost wages, women also emphasised the costs and inconveniences of public transport and travelling to unfamiliar towns and offices, and the risks of condescending treatment by officials. Although in Tamil Nadu women move around relatively freely, they are regularly monitored by husbands (often via mobile phones) and by relatives or other known people concerned about their honour (*maanam*) in public spaces.

This gendered burden of waiting was also present in Saharanpur, although with a degree of ambivalence around women in public life and space. While women's time was ascribed less value than men's, women's engagements with the public sphere were further mediated by practices of *purdah* and notions of reputation, demeanour, character, embodied practice, and how one is seen by society - often being bound up in the vernacular of *chāl-chalan* (Chambers & Ansari, 2018). Moreover, the gendered nature of women's involvement with cards, government schemes and ration shops intersected with other identity markers, not least social status and class. It has long been recognised that *purdah* (in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities) is aligned with the social position of those involved. With increasing status, women are more likely to withdraw, or be withdrawn, from the public sphere to express respectability and relative wealth (Chen, 1995; Das, 2005; Sen, 1999), although this tends to relax with age (Das Gupta, 1995).

Despite this, women are often at the forefront of application processes, particularly in poorer Muslim families where men cannot take time off work or pay intermediaries. Indeed, while middle/upper classes enforce *purdah* most rigorously, for poorer Muslims respectability and maintenance of *chāl-chalan* clash with pressures of everyday life. Bano, a 32-year-old woman, married to a lorry driver and engaged in piece-rate woodwork, explained:

Men ... tell us they can do just one work, either earn or waste time. Our brothers and husbands never have time for making cards. It is not good for us. We have responsibility of home and children. We have lots of work, but instead we have to go for cards that we never get. Some do not want to go as it is bad for our *chāl-chalan* to go there and so they don't try for cards. [...] We get cards,

but it is mostly the men who use them for work or getting loans. The cards are for family, but men never give time in this.

Bano's statement reveals not just gendered considerations around the practicalities of card making, in which men and women juggle different responsibilities, but also the different value attributed women's time. While men's time is seen as precious, that of women is seen as flexible, abundant, and suited to waiting and going 'to and fro', or - as men argue - being 'wasted,' despite the risks compromising *chāl-chalan*. Women themselves emphasise the burden that paperwork adds to multiple demands placed on their time and experience intensified forms of subjugation as government offices are dominated by Hindu men and located in areas of the city clearly marked as Hindu spaces. Visiting a government office, therefore, regularly involves crosses 'imagined borders' within the city, which transforms what is a symbol of piety and respect (particularly the wearing of a *niqab* or *burka*) in the Muslim neighbourhood into a mark of suspicion and questionable character (Chambers, forthcoming).

### **When things go wrong: yearning for dignity and transparency**

Processes become particularly challenging for women when things go wrong. In Tamil Nadu, Anita, who migrated to the area with her family ten years ago, told us what happened when she lost her ration card during a house move:

The first time I gave my application they told me to bring my bank passbook. Next time they said that was not enough and that I should bring my Aadhaar card. Then they said they needed my voter card. The fourth time they said I should bring the house tax receipt.

This receipt had to be supplied by their landlord, but he was unwilling to search for it and Anita could not obtain a replacement ration card. Apart from not having the paperwork, Anita felt intensely frustrated at being constantly sent back for different documents:

I didn't meet the Tahsildar, only the assistant ... you talk to them, but they just ask you to come back. Maybe I went 4 or 5 times. Each time I waited one or two hours. ... you must sit outside and fill the form. Then you go inside and stand in the queue. Then they take it and check the documents. [The last time] they said that without the house tax document, they cannot consider my application. ...When we ask why it is taking so long, they say 'why are you in such a hurry?' That's an assault!

In Tamil Nadu, the English term 'assault' is used not only for a physical attack but also to describe feeling insulted or disrespected. Anita uses it to convey her anger at being treated disrespectfully by officials who consider neither her person nor time as important. Crucially, Anita's vulnerability is further enhanced by her migrant status and lack of local networks.

Similar concerns were expressed by Salma, a Muslim woman in Saharanpur. Salma had difficulties obtaining a ration card following estrangement from her

family. Her cross-*biraderi* marriage was disapproved, hence neither family was willing to remove the newlyweds' names from their ration cards, so Salma and her husband could not obtain a separate card. A local *neta* (politician) running for re-election promised to help them in exchange for their votes but this was not honoured:

Ration cards are hard [to get] and usually only possible at election time or with big money. A *neta* promised to help if he won the election, but once he won his assistant shouted at me 'why are you here?' I explained but the *neta* also shouted 'how dare you come here, I do not know who you are'. They sent me out shouting 'You have no manners'. They did not care for my respect [...] I will never show faith in a *neta* again.

Salma was upset both at the betrayed promise and at being insulted. Cards and their application processes are carriers of sentiment, or as Navaro-Yashin calls them, 'affectively loaded phenomena' (2007: 81). They draw on affective devices - humiliation and shaming - to construct the poor as compliant welfare clients rather than rights-bearing citizens. They are made to wait, come back and present more paperwork, while being humiliated and left uninformed about outcomes. Applicants are left with uncertainty, vagueness, and a sense of indignity.

Gulfam, a 28-year-old carpenter, and Faisal, a 32-year-old brass worker, described this sense of opaqueness:

We have been waiting a long time for the ration card, but they just say 'now the government is not sending the cards' and other reasons. We keep returning... I went 10 or 20 times. Always they said, 'come again after one month' or 'come after 3 months'. Always we get some new date or new time to return.

Even the introduction of new technologies aimed at disembedding application processes from socio-political contexts often end up intensifying feelings of obscurity and poor transparency. Mehboob, a day labourer from a village around 10 km outside Saharanpur, complained:

They put my details in the internet but now it is stuck, and the ration card is not coming [...] When they made the Aadhaar card they took all our scans like eye and fingerprint, but I do not know where this goes, it is all in the internet, but we cannot understand this.

Although hopes are placed on digital and biometric technologies making the state more transparent and accountable, results are often don't match expectation (Masiero, 2015). While further research is needed, our evidence so far suggests that novel technologies also produce new obscurities, information gaps and forms of mediation, especially in contexts where the poor

and marginalised lack access to, and knowledge of, technology-mediated application processes.

Paperwork gets stuck, and people do not know where, why or for how long. Through processes of making people wait and return, giving no or partial information, and remaining vague about paper trails, state officials produce citizens as less-than-adult and less-than-capable applicants, rather than full claim-making citizens. In the process, cards act as 'affectively loaded' devices channelling humiliation, disrespect and non-recognition as modes of subordination.

### **On time and money**

A lack of clarity extends to bribing itself. Anita, above, never paid money, and did not know if it would even help: 'If they tell me to give money, I will give it. But they are not asking for that.' Yet many were clear that connections and money can lighten the burden of waiting and speed application processes. As another informant explained 'if you need something, you have to pay something'. Caste, class and religious identity turn waiting into a highly differentiated experience, yet even for those of higher social status money plays a role. Abdul, a Congress *neta* in his 40s who often mediated applications on behalf of others told of problems and resorting to cash payments:

I also give money for cards. Recently I gave Rs 1,000 and the next day got a BPL card for a constituent. We have an agent here; we call him 'Doctor'. He takes money and comes back quickly with the card; I was surprised! Once we needed an urgent birth certificate, but it was a Sunday. The Doctor returned in just one hour with everything completed, only he can manage all these things like this. When I give money my headache for getting cards transfers to him. The public know him and give money to save their time.

Money greases application processes that otherwise might take weeks or months to conclude. As Abdul sums up, 'People are giving money to buy time, they are giving so that their time is not wasted'.

But not everyone can pay to save time. A common complaint amongst poorer people was that this was easier for the wealthier and better-connected because of levels of literacy, social capital and ability to pay bribes. For the poor payments are rarely an option. Joy, a recently divorced young mother in Mannapalayam, was in dispute with her ex-husband who refused to return documents including her daughter's birth certificate and Joy's bank book. Joy told of the complex process of applying for a duplicate birth certificate. In theory this should be simple but in fact involved endless trips to town. She didn't pay although she was told: 'if you give money it will go quicker'. She explained:

I can't give money, so I am going back and forth. ... I applied ... about six months ago. For four months I went whenever they told me... they said 'come back on Monday', or 'come back next week'. Only for the last two months I stopped going. When I went they said I only applied in July, and that people who applied earlier are still waiting, so it will be another three months. ... For about a month I took leave and was working just on that. I used to work in a powerloom but due to this lost my job ... now it is very difficult.

Initially, her father accompanied her to the offices, as he knew people there. However, 'he too was losing wages by coming with me... so [after] the first two times ...I went alone.' Being introduced to people proved helpful as 'without "known people" (*therinthavanga*) it would be difficult. If you have money, you can do things much faster, but because I have no money, I must wait.'

Lacking financial capacity, Joy went back many times, utilising the contact, or 'known person' her father introduced. Her divorce made Joy particularly vulnerable and her patronage networks were limited. In relation to a different official document, Joy needed the signature of her village president, but he came from a neighbouring hamlet and had little interest in Mannapalayam so refused. Initially she tried to mobilise existing patronage networks, asking the local District Councillor to ring the president to ask his help. This failed, and it was only after subjugating herself, through an affective performance of begging and crying in his office, that he signed. People are often left exasperated and humiliated by the acts of subordination they must undergo as part of applications. These narratives illustrate how waiting and going 'to and fro' undermine already insecure livelihoods, unleash affective reactions, and reproduce positions of powerlessness. The outcome of Joy's engagements with local state actors was, thus, not arbitrary in the sense described by Gupta (2012: 6). Rather, gender, caste and class-based discrimination is a systemic bureaucratic outcome produced through everyday processes of waiting orchestrated by state actors seeking to deprive people of their legal entitlements.

### **Intersections of class, religion and gender**

Whilst in Tamil Nadu low-caste migrants and Dalits bear the brunt of state officials' discriminatory practices, in urban Saharanpur Muslims of various classes find themselves subjected to waiting, queuing and the fickleness of state representatives. Changes to who holds political power at different levels matters a great deal. In a village on the outskirts of Saharanpur, 28-year-old Dilshad and his parents explained how under the previous Muslim *pradhan* (village head) cards could be more easily obtained than under the incumbent Hindu *pradhan*. During earlier fieldwork in 2012, Islam, a 32-year-old brass overlayer, had been trying unsuccessfully to obtain a ration card. When the Samajwadi party won the state elections with the support of Muslim votes and *netas* (politicians) from the neighbourhoods, Islam activated these



newly available networks by making a call to a new *neta* who he knew previously. The *neta* arrived and berated the officials. Although the card remains unissued to this day, the intervention offered a degree of performative significance in making Islam feel empowered, if only in an affective sense.

While Dilshad (above) argued that local political change facilitated card-making, Islam's case also illustrates limits. Following regime change, local *netas* may be able to engage in public acts that express their authority, but such performative interventions may have little impact on the bureaucratic process. Across India Muslims remain marginalised (Sachar et al., 2006; Jaffrelot and Gayer, 2012), a process that the 2014 BJP victory in national elections further intensified. As Sajid, another local resident reflected, 'The Samajwadi Party helps us most and the BJP makes most problems. .... Now it is the BJP and they know the Muslims do not vote for them, so do not help us. They only help Hindus.'

However, the city's Muslim population also recognised that these problems were not exclusive to them but affected poorer people across communities. As Faisal, a 29-year-old woodworker stated:

It is no different for Muslims. The lady at our ration centre does not even make the cards for her own Hindu relatives unless they pay. It is only money not religion that makes cards. Only for the rich is it different. It is only the rich who do not wait.

Indeed, class position and political connections are key in shaping ordinary people's waiting for the state. Hamza, a well-off daughter of a local politician, was frank in confirming that for wealthier well-connected Muslims temporal experiences do differ:

The system is very beneficial for me. I am very rich. My father is a politician. I will get the ration whether it is under a woman's or man's name. The ration dealer is afraid of me. He gives me rations even without the card.

While in Saharanpur religion and class intersect to create 'a fragmented hierarchic space' (Frølund, 2016), gendered aspects make the experiences of working class Muslim women like those of Dalit women in Tamil Nadu. Despite social pressures to maintain *purdah*, poorer Muslim women are extensively involved in visiting offices, waiting in line and engaging with state officials. *Purdah*, although not to be reified (Chambers & Ansari, 2018), produces embodied experiences that further entrench gendered vulnerabilities in women's encounters with state officials. Salma, who lived in a small rented house in Hasan Nagar, was widowed and recently remarried, but remained responsible for all paperwork despite being given little recognition by officials:

The government makes many problems. Our husbands do not have time for formalities due to work, so it is us who wait in the line, but the officials do not listen to *ladies*, they only listen to *gents*. [...] When the official sees

the *burka* or veil they start to misbehave. They think we are uneducated and don't know anything. They only listen to Hindu ladies' complaints.

Salma's comments regarding the materiality of the *burka* when engaging with Hindu officials point to embodied and affective experiences that set Muslim women apart. Experiences of time and space are located within the broader spatial contexts of the city that produce notions of belonging. Marked physical divides, as well as imagined borders, within the city and in the subjectivities of neighbourhood residents (Chambers, forthcoming), act to emphasise a sense of being 'out of place' in other parts of the city. Whilst some men wear their beard long and kurta short, marking them out as Muslim, many (particularly young men) do not, enabling easier blending with those of other faiths. However, the relatively conservative approach to *purdah* in the neighbourhoods means women stand out in government offices located in predominantly Hindu areas. As such, they are often the subject of distrust and many female informants complained about being looked at suspiciously.

At the same time, however, women are not merely victims. Auyero's depiction of the poor as passive 'patients of the state' (Auyero, 2011) needs qualification in the Indian context. Informants' stories and observations of everyday interactions illustrate how women, in both Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, strategically utilise gender to raise their voices and challenge a predominantly patriarchal bureaucracy.

### **On agency and resistance**

Many women, like Joy and Salma, appear resigned to waiting, uncertainty and insecurity as they are sent back and forth between offices. In some ways, it is people's awareness of the importance of paperwork and cards that creates perseverance and makes them tolerate processes that strip them of dignity and construct compliant 'patients' (Auyero, 2011). Others, however, become angry and determined to claim their entitlements. Occasionally, indignation turns into open confrontation.

Rukmani is a Christian Dalit woman in Allapuram whose husband had been a local organiser for the DMK party. This gave her a degree of confidence and assertiveness that she was willing to use. She recounted how she obtained free household items that the Tamil Nadu government distributed after its 2011 election victory:

A while ago, they distributed free grinders, mixers and fans from Amma [the late Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa] to everyone in the village. People from different hamlets came to our village to collect the goods, but I ended up getting nothing. They refused to give me anything, so I went to the Collectorate in Tiruppur, where I was told to wait and queue alongside others... but even there I wasn't given anything, so I held up my green card [below poverty line ration card] and shouted: 'Should I be getting these things or not? Everyone got them, so why

don't I get them? I have a green card!' I threatened to come back on grievance day (*mannunidhi naal*)<sup>5</sup> and complain formally to the Collector. Then they finally gave it to me!

In Saharanpur, poorer Muslim women also acknowledged their ability to confront government officials. As 35-year-old Sameera points out:

Women can talk much more than men and shout if it is getting late. They can shout and quarrel with officers without fear. Women can talk in an abusive language and make a great deal of noise, but men cannot do this as the police can beat them, but it is not so easy for the police to beat women as it would look very bad for them.

Sameera's story reveals how a gendered normativity that acts to restrict women in some contexts may be subverted and turned into a strategic tool in others. While not transforming gender norms per se, women can momentarily draw on existing notions of femininity to have their voices heard. Both Rukmani and Sameera's acts illustrate that engaging in *affective* public performances can have impact. However, Rukmani's experience also shows that while these cards are hugely important to people's lives, the mere possession of a card does not automatically lead to the benefits it is meant to deliver. Cards must be 'activated' through social connections, face-to-face interactions and 'affectively loaded' confrontations. Public confrontations and other affective performances not only reveal the poor's determination to materialise their rights but also their yearning for recognition as citizens making legitimate claims. It is precisely because people's banal encounters with the state are ultimately about a desire to be seen, heard and recognised as rights-bearing citizens that they become so affectively charged.

Whilst confrontations may play on gendered positionalities, there are also occasions when such interactions challenge gender normativity. In Saharanpur, Rehana introduced herself saying 'you know I am a *khatara aurat* (danger woman)' when explaining her role as an agent who obtains cards and paperwork for other women in the area. Following her divorce, some years before, she started this work to make ends meet but gradually learnt to navigate the bureaucracy and raise her voice:

My help is important because ladies remain in the veil or hijab but I cannot do *pardah* as I work outside. ... I have the knowledge, experience and boldness for work in official places... First I was afraid but not now. I am like a danger woman all the officers know me as a danger woman. ... I am well respected among the women, but men gossip about me, they say that I go in the offices and that this is disrespectful in Muslim society. All the departments dislike me because of my boldness. I never give bribes when I can just raise my voice.

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<sup>5</sup> Grievance day refers to specific days during which citizens can come to the Collectorate and submit formal complaints about any government processes and officials. These are then directly heard and addressed by the District Collectors themselves.

Every officer fears me now and thinks I can expose their corruption. When I come... they say to each other that they should do my work fast so there is no argument and I will go away. ... ladies come to me for help as I can [go] boldly and without money.

Rukmani, Sameera and Rehana might not be typical women in their communities. However, they illustrate the agentic capacity in people's interactions with the state. While state encounters activate patterns of waiting and queuing that entrench women's vulnerabilities - intersected by class, caste and religion -, women simultaneously challenge state processes through embodied performances, affective confrontations and subversion of gendered hierarchies.

## Conclusion

This article has focused on time and temporality to gain insights into poor Indians' encounters with the state and the modalities through which citizens and citizenship are produced. Across India, many experience everyday interactions with the state through a temporal lens. Spatio-temporal processes such as waiting, queueing, and being sent back and forth lie at the heart of routine interactions with state officials, offices, middlemen and brokers. Some waiting is chronic in nature, such as when widows wait for years to draw a pension. Yet much evolves over shorter periods, here encapsulated in 'on the day' and 'to and fro' waiting. The narratives of waiting and circulating that we recount in this paper capture both temporal and spatial challenges that bureaucratic encounters entail.

Our comparative material from Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh makes several contributions to debates on state-society interaction, bureaucratic processes and the making of citizens. First, in line with Auyero (2011, 2012), Chatterjee (2008) and Gupta (2012), we have shown how temporal processes operate as mechanisms of power and control through which state actors and other mediators seek to produce dependent 'patients of the state' rather than full rights-bearing citizens. These less-than-complete-citizens often find themselves trapped in spatio-temporal interactions that continually undermine legitimate claims and meaningful citizenship. Here, we concur with Chatterjee's argument that the poor 'make their claims on government, and are governed, not within the framework of stable constitutionally defined rights and laws, but rather through *temporary*, contextual and unstable arrangements embodied in direct political negotiations' (2008: 57, emphasis added). However, while such negotiations often leave people with feelings of uncertainty, confusion and arbitrariness, the outcomes themselves are not produced in arbitrary ways. Our evidence shows – *contra* to Gupta (2012) - that they are the systemic product of gender, caste and religious based forms of discrimination through which the exclusion of already vulnerable and marginalised social groups is reproduced. Waiting thus reveals itself as a quintessential tool of bureaucratic state power.

Secondly, we have illustrated the role played by money, networks, patronage and a range of performative acts. Waiting times can be reduced by paying the right fee to the right person, and while wealthier people have a clear advantage by being able to utilise a combination of money and middlemen, the rural and urban poor too seek to avoid payments by calling on whatever connections they have. Others resort to various embodied and affective performances: shouting, begging or crying to get things done. Sometimes, this can be quite forceful, extending into open confrontation. Following Navaro-Yashin (2007) we argue that it is not only material documents that are affectively loaded, but also the processes of waiting and queuing through which they are obtained. The interactions through which paperwork is accessed and claims are made are infused with various affective expressions: disrespect, humiliation, non-recognition, anger and determination. Importantly, however, it is the very same affective terrain that offers avenues for people to appeal to the state and to challenge gendered normativity and forms of subjugation based on caste and religion. Ordinary people repeatedly activate agency to subvert the state's temporal impositions. Thus, in contrast to Auyero's (2011) conclusions, they appear not so much as 'passive' patients of the state but as actors who seek to mobilise whatever material and affective resources available to them.

Thirdly, our evidence shows that agency regarding claim making and citizenship remains hinged on class position and on structural inequalities of caste and religion. In rural Tamil Nadu, Dalits suffer discrimination from higher caste Hindus, while in Saharanpur Muslims often face disproportionate problems from both local Hindu state actors and national level anti-Muslim politics. Crucially, however, across both localities, poverty, caste and religion intersect with strongly gendered patterns of state-society engagement. By spending time and effort, women play key roles in claiming rights and hence the making of citizenship itself. Women queue, wait, return, beg and shout. In the process, they risk their honour, dignity or *chāl-chalan*, and are routinely exposed to humiliation and abuse. As women are made to wait, beg and be patient, not only state power but also gendered hierarchies of citizenship are reproduced at the state-society interface.

Waiting for the state includes waiting for recognition as full and meaningful citizens of India. Our ethnography shows that recognition by the state is an iterative process in which access to signatures, cards, schemes and rights requires ongoing negotiations rather than one-off actions. Even when relevant cards have been obtained, they rarely constitute more than a step in the direction of meaningful citizenship and state recognition. As shown, cards and paperwork must be repeatedly acted upon to yield particular rights or entitlements – be they a pension or a set of subsidised government goods. At the same time, however, achieving official recognition (in the form of a ration or Aadhaar card) is clearly an important step in the process. It provides a starting point from which to make rightful claims and constitutes a material and symbolic change in people's relationships with the state. It also has the potential to enhance confidence to engage in acts of resistance - alongside compliance - in the knowledge that such acts may enable further material and

symbolic gains. Throughout, however, the making of citizens remains an ongoing process and the resulting citizenship a necessarily incomplete and differentiated property.

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